

THE  
Great Objection

Concerning the

QUAKERS  
MEETINGS

Fully Answered.

*Wherein, in several Particulars, it is proved*

That although the said People do meet together, yet they  
are not transgressors of the Law, according to Right Reason,  
which is the Ground and Foundation thereof;  
and therefore according to Equity and good  
Conscience, ought not to suffer for so doing,  
neither ought their MEETINGS  
to be suppressd.

*R. Westfield (R.)*

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By a lover of all righteous Laws, and just Government, and  
one unto whom such Laws are not a terror, R. W.

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*The Law is good if a man use it lawfully; for the Law is not made for  
a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly  
and for sinners, for the unholy and prophane, &c. and against any  
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## The great Objection concerning the Quakers Meetings, fully answered.

**W**Hereas it is objected against the People called Quakers, That they are transgressors of the Kings Law, and therefore the sufferings which is inflicted upon them, is just, and the Magistrate bound by his Oath to inflict the same; and that if they would free themselves from those sufferings, they must conform to the Law, and that they may not call those sufferings persecution for Conscience-sake, but execution of the Law, and Administration of Justice.

And forasmuch as the said people called Quakers, are found in the practice of that which seems to be forbidden by the Law, and therefore by many are judged transgressors of the Law; these following particulars being seriously weighed, and duly considered, may serve to convince all sober-minded people, that according to the true intent and meaning of the Law, (as it is agreeable to the righteous end of all Government) the said people are not guilty of the transgression thereof; and therefore in Equity and good Conscience ought not to suffer the penalties, and undergo the punishments that are therein prescribed.

I. The just Laws of *England*, and all Nations, are grounded upon Right Reason; and it hath been the declared opinion of the most able Lawyers, (yea, and a Maxime among them) That whatever Law is made, if it be not grounded upon right Reason, and hath not that for its foundation, such a Law so made, is in it self null and void.

II. And this Right Reason hath always respect to the good and well being of all people, who are to be governed by such Laws, to protect, countenance and encourage the good in the well-doing, and to discountenance and punish the contrary,

and to prevent men from doing evil, and from hurting, injuring and destroying one another, and to keep all in peace and love, that people might live a quiet and peaceable life, in all godliness and honesty : And this is the righteous End of all Government; and if any Law be made contrary to this End, its against the very Being and End of all just Government.

III. And the Reason of the Law is expressed in the Preamble to the Law or Statute ; and the Reason so expressed ought always to be the Rule of his, or their Judgements ( both in the Exposition and Execution thereof ) who are intrusted with the Administration of the Law , and Judgement ought to be given accordingly.

IV. And herein onely doth the Magistrate perform his trust and keep his Oath, as he hath respect to the Reason on which the Law is grounded, and makes that the Rule of his Judgement in all cases, and proceeds accordingly ; and not in the strict observance of the Formalities and Punctillioes , which are but the skirts and suburbs of the Law, Reason being the very life and substance thereof.

V. And if any judgement be given, or Law put in execution contrary to the Reason of the Law, such a Judgement or Execution is in it self unjust, and contrary to the Law, and therefore may not be called Execution of Justice, or Administration of the Law, but Injustice and Oppression on whomsoever it is acted.

VI. And if that which is alledged as the Reason of the Law (and ought to be the Rule of Judgement in the Administration and Execution thereof ) be not so in it self, then such a Law so made, is groundless, and without foundation ; and as its said, *Where there is no Law, there is no transgression* ; so where there is no cause found which is alledged as the Reason of the Law, there being no transgression or evil committed, there is no need of a Law.

VII. Now the Reason exprest in the Preamble to the Law  
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made against the Meetings of the People called *Quakers*, is a suggestion, that under pretence of Religious Worship, the said persons do often assemble themselves in great numbers in several parts of this Realm, to the great endangering of the public peace and safety, and to the terror of the people, by maintaining a secret and strict correspondence amongst themselves, &c. These are the words in the Preamble to the Law, as the reason thereof.

VIII. And if the case were rightly stated, and their Judgements truly informed who made this Law, as concerning the end and intent of such Meetings, and that they were really of such bad Consequence, & would produce such evil effects, then it were good reason to suppress them, and this reason were a good ground and foundation for such a Law, because it makes provision for public peace and safety, and to prevent the contrary.

IX. But if the case be mis-stated concerning the end and intent of such their Meetings; and that it neither hath, doth, or can produce such effects as is suggested, then there is no reason for such a Law, and so no ground nor foundation, and consequently no Law; and where there is no Law, there can be no transgression, and in good Conscience ought to be no punishment.

X. And the Reason of the Law being the Rule of Judgment to every one, in the Exposition, Execution and Administration of the Law, in order to the performing their Trust, and keeping their Oaths inviolably, if they are perswaded in their Consciences that the people called *Quakers* are not guilty of the crimes suggested, nor their Meetings held to such intents, nor do produce such effects as is alledged as the Reason of the Law; such Magistrates so perswaded, are not obliged by their Oaths to suppress such Meetings, nor to inflict penalties and punishments upon the persons of them which do so meet together.

XI. But we the people called *Quakers*, have the Testimony of a clear Conscience in the sight of God, concerning our innocency, and the uprightness of our hearts in this particular, that what is suggested against us, as the end or intent of our meeting together, never entered into our hearts, neither

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was ever such effects produced through any occasion by us given; and in this case we appeal to the Consciences of all Magistrates in *England*, yea even to our greatest Enemies, and to all the World, Whether ever it were known, or can be proved against us, That we design any such things in our Meetings; or whether such effects have at any time been produced by reason of such our Meetings. Therefore we judge, That according to Reason and good Conscience we ought to enjoy our Meetings, and not have them suppress, nor we made to suffer in our Persons or Estates for so doing.

XII. Again, the Reason of the Law (which is the very life and being thereof) supposeth, That the people called *Quakers* do only pretend to Religious Worship in their said Meetings, but that the intent of their Meetings is the disturbance of the publike peace, &c. which if so, it is acknowledged it were very just and reasonable, yea absolutely necessary to suppress them; because the suppressing of them would tend to the preservation of the publike peace and safety.

XIII. Therefore it appears by the Reason of the Law, That it was not the intent of them that made the Law, to suppress Meetings that are indeed for Religious Worship, but such who only pretend thereunto, and under such pretences design something to the endangering of the publike peace: So that Meetings which are indeed and in truth kept for Religious Worship towards God, free from all such evil designs and false pretences, are not (according to the Reason of the Law) to be suppress, nor the persons so meeting, to be punished.

XIV. Then if the people called *Quakers* do really and intentionally meet in a way of Religious Worship towards God, according to the perswasion of their Consciences, free and clear from all such false pretences, and evil designs, and that their Meetings do produce no such bad effects as the Reason of the Law provides against, then the Reason of the Law being the root and foundation, yea the life and being thereof, is not against them, neither is the Magistrate obliged by his oath to execute it upon them.

XV. But we the people called *Quakers*, are clear in our consciences in the sight of the Lord, that our Meetings together is not under a pretence of Religious Worship, to disturb the publike



like peace, or to endanger the same, nor to hurt or injure any person whatsoever, either in life, limb, liberty or estate, nor to affright or terrifie them; but in the fear of the Lord in reality and intention of our hearts, to worship him in the spirit and in the truth, according to the perswasion of his holy spirit in our hearts and consciences, wherety we are drawn in desires after him, that we might come to the knowledge of him whom to know is life eternal, and might enjoy his presence in our souls, which is more to us than all the glory of the World, and might know his leadings, and follow him who is the Captain of our salvation, and Prince of Peace, who leads his people out of darkness, and out of all unrighteousness, and puts an end to all strife, and takes away the occasion of Wars, by slaying the lust in the heart, from whence Wars cometh; Who teacheth us to love enemies, and to endeavour the good of all people, and to seek to save mens lives, and not destroy them. And this is the very end of our meeting together, to wait upon the Lord to feel the operation of his holy Spirit in our hearts, thus to order our conversation, that we might do that which is well pleasing in his sight, and have the testimony in our hearts, that we are accepted of him, that we might live to his praise and glory, who is over all, God blessed for ever.

XVI. And if Magistrates are thus perswaded, and can thus believe concerning the ground and end of our Meetings, We hope they wil not then judge themselves bound or obliged by their Oaths to execute the Law upon us, because its contrary to the Reason thereof; and we believe many at this day are thus perswaded concerning us; and we are confident, that for these divers years past, since we have been of this persuasion, and distinguished from other people by the Name of *makers*, and meet together after this manner, though there hath happened many and great revolutions in the world, and especially in this land wherein we live, yet it cannot be proved that we have intermeddled with those things, neither hath any such things been acted or designed by us, as is suggested, and as the reason of the Law provides against, although our provocations thereunto hath been very great, and the opportunities of advantage to free our selves from our great and innocent sufferings, very many.

XVII. Again, it is to be considered, that by the Law many  
time

times in one and the same action, the intent and purpose of the mind, very much alters the case, and makes it more or less hainous; and the Reason of the Law doth proportion punishments suitable thereunto; yea, in the same cases the very purpose of the mind in one and the same action, makes it to be a transgression in a high nature, or no transgression at all. As for instance, The killing of any person, although the action may be one and the same, yet it is found either wilful Murder, or Man-slaughter, according to the purpose of his mind that committed the Fact; and the Reason of the Law makes a difference in the punishment. So also in the breaking open of a House, if it be with a Felonious intent, to steal any thing out of the House, it is Burglary, which is death without benefit of the Clergy. But if a person break into a House, or break down a House to stop or prevent fire in a Town or City, it is no transgression by the law. And here onely the intent of the mind alters the case, although the action be one and the same.

XVIII. So although the People called *Quakers* are found in action of meeting together, yet forasmuch as the intent of their minds is not to do those things which the Reason of the Law provides against, which is exprest in the Preamble thereof, neither can those things be proved against them, nor such effects ever produced by them; therefore the reason of the law doth not condemn them for meeting together, neither according to Equity and good Conscience ought they to suffer for so doing.

*The consideration of these things (though many more weighty Reasons might be given to plead our justification and vindication in this matter) may serve to convince any that are entrusted with the Execution that Law, that they are no more obliged by their Oaths, then they required by the Act it self, to put it in execution upon us, and this Objection commonly made against us, is fully answered.*

Southampton the 18th. of  
the 8th. Month, 1662.

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*Robert Wastfield.*

